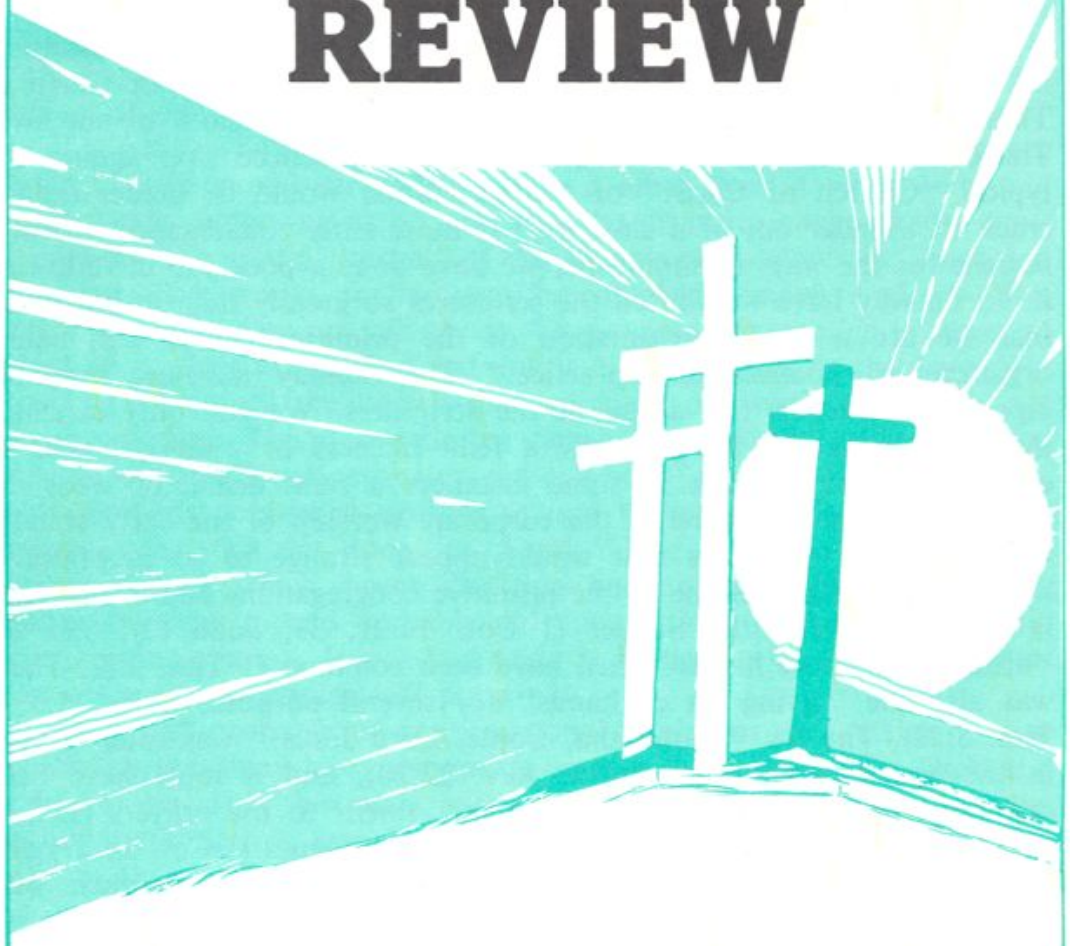
RESTORATION REVIEW



THE CHURCH'S TASK

The essential contribution of the Church to peace and justice in the world is a fellowship which actually realizes (even if only in foretaste) that peace and justice which Christ has won for all peoples in his atoning death and resurrection.
— Lesslie Newbigin in *Unfinished Agenda*

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The Adventures of the Early Church …

THE SUNDAY MORNING RIP-OFF

If by means of a time-tunnel we could be transposed to an assembly of the primitive saints, such as a gathering of the Church of Christ in Thessalonica or Philippi, we would likely be in for the shock of our lives. The contrast between what they believed and practiced over against the typical "Church of Christ" of this generation would be bolder than a crack of thunder out of a clear sky. If those early congregations form a *pattern* for the way we should be, we have done a poor job in following it. In no way have we abused the scriptures so grossly than in our claim that we are a true representation of the primitive church "in name, organization, doctrine and practice. " The Sunday morning assembly especially illustrates this abuse of the scriptures. We can only conclude that it is a rip-off, being hardly a feint likeness of what it claims to emulate. Moreover, it is in some instances a rank denial of what the scriptures reveal as crucial in the corporate worship of the early church.

The list of things that would appear strange to us in primitive worship is extensive. Some of the primitive congregations had a love feast in connection with the Supper (1 Cor. 14:21, 33; Jude 12), and the "lifting up of holy hands" must have been common (1 Tim. 2:8). There was also the "laying on of hands" for several purposes (Acts 13:3; 1 Tim. 5:22). The cry "Maranatha, Come, Lord Jesus!" was often prayed in the assemblies (1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20), and it must have been common for them to speak out and say *Amen!* to the prayers (1 Cor. 14:16). There were at least some who spoke in tongues (1 Cor. 14:27) and they were instructed to call for the elders to pray and anoint them with oil when seriously ill (Jas. 5:14).

Some of the sisters prayed and prophesied in the assembly *with their heads covered* (1 Cor. 11:5) and some of them served as deacons (Ro, 16:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). They confessed their sins to one another (Jas. 5:14) and they sometimes greeted each other with a holy kiss (1 Thess. 5:26; Rom. 16:16). Their assemblies were more spontaneous than structured, and they all shared in building each other up (Eph. 4:16). They owned no property, met mostly in homes, and were often persecuted to the point that they assembled in secret. They were ever conscious of the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 1:5), prayed in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18), were filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), and drank of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). Their assemblies were such that sinners were likely to bow down, seeing that God was indeed among them (1 Cor. 14:25). They probably knelt in prayer to the Father

(Eph. 3:14), and perhaps sometimes they stood, but almost certainly they never sat. I agree with Prof. Metzger at Princeton that sitting in prayer before the God of heaven is an innovation of the modern church, that all through its early history the church always knelt or stood.

If all this would not be startling enough to a 20th century church member, there would surely be missing a great deal of what we would expect to see, supposing as he does that the primitive congregations must have been "the spittin' image" of the churches he knows in Texas and Tennessee. They would, for instance, be ,completely unaware of any "five acts of worship" that we talk about. They would see *worship* in terms of the whole of their life in God and not as a series of acts in their meetings (Ro. 12:1). Some of the "acts" that we count off would very likely not even be evident. There was almost certainly nothing like our "Sunday morning offering" and probably no collection at all in the assemblies, except perhaps occasional gestures toward the poor —though it cannot be proved that this was done "at church." The collection in 1 Cor. 16:2 was provisional, which means that they had not been doing this before Paul asked them to and probably did not continue it after he came and took the money away. It was laid aside at home, not in the assembly, as most every Greek scholar will point out.

There was probably no congregational singing as we practice it, if at all, though they may have chanted to each other antiphonally (back and forth), as an early historian indicates. They did have solos, for any brother that "hath a hymn" was encouraged to sing it (1 Cor. 14:26). None of the scriptures about singing are related *per* se to the assembly, but to the personal life of the believer, and they call for *"addressing one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," which is hardly a description of congregational singing. So, if we can't establish congregational singing, we cannot establish a musical accompaniment. It is likely, however, that if a brother in the early church chose to "sing a psalm" (Col. 3:16), he might well have used one of the many instruments available in that day, especially if he were a Jewish believer, for a *psalm* to him meant playing as well as singing. The *Selahs* in the Psalms were probably the cue for a musical interlude. The Jewish brother, if not the Gentile, would be inclined to "Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp!" as Ps. 150 would instruct him. So, in giving his psalm to you in either his home or at the assembly he would likely accompany it or intersperse it with melodious touches of the harp or the gentle sounds of a lute. I realize that this would deeply distress our visitor from Sixth and Izard in Little Rock, but he might find himself enraptured in the Spirit in spite of himself. He might even fall down and worship, seeing that God is indeed among them, harp or no harp!

Conspicuously absent would be “the minister” or “the pastor,” a position that we have taken more from our religious neighbors than from the scriptures. The primitive churches were nourished by the elders or shepherds of the flock (Acts 20:28), while evangelists were out breaking new ground for the Lord. The believers were generally knowledgeable and able to teach each other (Ro. 15:14), and so in the assemblies they mutually edified one another (1 Pet. 4:9-11). Paul could say to the Corinthians (14:26), *When you come together each one has a lesson.* Not so in our assemblies. A brother may share with the Masons, the Elks, the Lions, and the Alcoholics Anonymous, but in the assembly of saints he has to be a spectator, however meaningful a lesson he may have. He is victimized by the Sunday morning rip-off.

The modern saint might also be made uncomfortable by the crude simplicity of primitive worship. He might be sandwiched in between smelly fishermen, fresh from their nets, or slaves just from the fields, smelling no better (Jas. 2:2). He might be seated not in a cushioned pew in an air-conditioned edifice, but on the damp floor of a catacomb, buried away from the searching eyes of Roman authorities. On more propitious occasions it would be in some believer’s humble abode, where the less poor would gather with their destitute brothers in the Lord, some of whom were owned by other men, spread out their nap sacks in a love feast and break bread in the name of him “who was rich, but became poor, so that they might be rich.”

Still later as the rich and the noble accepted the faith they had more comfortable and commodious homes in which to gather (Philemon 2), and they periodically had the protection of the law. But it was two centuries before they bought property and went into the real estate business —and into apostasy! With all this came the clergy and the seminary to educate them, which the historian Mosheim describes as “the grave of primitive Christianity.” Soon we had “our image” to think about, and with the passing centuries we came to think in terms of million dollar edifices. And so came the Sunday morning rip-off. The claim that we are *that* church that we read about in the New Testament, and that in our life and worship we duplicate what they were and what they did, is the biggest counterfeit in human history. We are duped into believing the grand clerical lie, that we —and only we —are the New Testament church. It is a colossal rip-off.

We are hamstrung by buildings, real estate, pews, pulpits, clergy, treasuries and budgets. Our leaders have to monitor what is said in the assembly lest a tradition be challenged or a sister church be offended. We cringe if a brother lifts his hands in prayer or speaks in a tongue, and we would be shocked at the cry of Maranatha. And of course *Amens* and *praise the Lord* are off limits. We have our image to think about and the

buildings to pay for. We *sit* —believe it, many of our churches *sit* —in prayer to the King of the Universe, even with our knees still crossed, while the humblest monarch of earth is never approached by one of his subjects with such passivity. We count our worship in terms of "acts" and watch the clock to make sure it ends on time. We "go to worship" and "leave worship," as if it were something that can be turned off and on. We employ all the modern gadgetry we want whether multiple cups for the Supper, the Sunday School, the pulpit and the professional staff that goes with it, budgets and sub budgets, auxiliary institutions of all sorts, agencies and societies —all this and more, and yet we manage to find "prooftexts" that all we do is after the ancient, apostolic order. We are impatient with those who object to what we do, labeling them hobbyists, while at the same time we draw the line of fellowship on those who practice what we oppose, calling them heretics. Our arrogance reaches the point to where we can drive by an edifice marked "Church of Christ" and be satisfied that it is one more New Testament church in name, organization, doctrine and practice; but if it be a Christian Church or a Baptist Church, we can only regret that they haven't accepted "the truth" like we have and are not just like us. It turns the unity plea that began with the Campbells into a call for conformity. *Simply be like us!* That is the only answer anybody needs for the age-old problem of a divided church!

I am not saying that we must do precisely as the primitive saints did, even if we could lift from the records an exact picture. I do not accept the view of *patternism.* If God intended this, he would have given us a more detailed outline of procedures. I do not believe that we have to meet in catacombs or private homes like they did. I believe we *may* have congregational singing, budget and a treasury, and even a professional staff (so long as it allows for Body ministry), even though they probably had none of these things. I believe we can be the Body of Christ in this world whether we have the organ or not, whether we have Sunday Schools or not, or whether we have this or that movement or this or that agency or supporting church or not. There must be value in lifting holy hands, fasting, washing the saints' feet, the holy kiss, speaking in tongues, and the *Maranatha* or they would not find expression in the life of the early church. But I do not conclude that these are *necessary* for us, even if they do prove to be useful to some.

My plea is that we recognize what is essential and that we unite on that basis. That we *be* the Body of Christ is essential, holding to the one faith, the one Lord, the one baptism. It is essential that we meet in the name of Christ and break bread within his fellowship, encouraging and edifying one another. We are all to go to the scriptures in search of those norms that will direct our life and worship. We will differ in our interpretation of the information we have. Some will choose to meet in homes and not own a church edifice. Some will elect to have instrumental music while others will remain acappella. Some will

form agencies for mission work and some will prefer direct support, while still others will be content to do nothing. In spite of such differences we can all be the Body of Christ together, united in essentials.

The rip-off comes when any of us presume to be *the* church to the exclusion of all other believers. We are only playing the counterfeit role when we claim to be the exact reproduction of the primitive church at work and worship, when in fact we take as many liberties with what is actually in the scriptures as the next people. No group today is the New Testament church in the sense that it is an exact likeness of what the scriptures reveal —if for no other reason because the scriptures yield no one, composite picture of what that church was. We all choose what we like, and then reject the other fellow because he selects things that we neglect. We can and *must* recover what is catholic or universal —that which is necessary for all time and in all places to be the Body of Christ.

This "faith of our fathers" we can have even while sitting in cushioned pews and luxurious buildings, even if such things are often obstacles. To bear the likeness of Jesus and to grow in him, being filled with his Spirit, is a universal. To worship him in the fellowship of the saints around the Supper is a universal. The seven unities of Eph. 4 are universals. But whether a brother speaks in tongues, fasts twice a week, tithes, or has a piano at his church is *not* a matter of the catholic faith.

We have been taken, been "had," when we allow ourselves to be duped into believing what Dr. Robert Richardson, that grand old pioneer of the Restoration Movement, calls "the fallacy of synecdoche," which is to presume that only a part is the whole. Surely we do not have to believe that the kingdom of God begins and ends with us, that as we sit in the assembly that we, and only we, reflect the faith of the primitive believers. It should be enough for us to be a part (not party) of the great Church of God on earth, however bruised it may be by the scourge of division.

When I sit with the saints on Sunday morning in a typical "Church of Christ," my view of things is rather simple. *These too are God's people,* I say to myself, they are my brothers and sisters and I love them. But in saying that I realize that God also has some children at the other churches in town, not because they're Methodists or Baptists, but because they too have been saved by "the bath of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5). Even if I am non-instrumental music by preference, I realize that the kingdom of God does not consist of such matters. And I allow no one to deceive me

into believing that "we have restored the primitive church" in the way we worship. I would have to smile at that, for in a lot of ways I know we haven't, and that others have done better at this in some areas than we have.

But we are immersed believers. We do look to Jesus, more or less, and we believe in bearing his likeness. We break bread together, and to the extent that I am allowed I share in the building up of the church. If we can't go home to be with the Lord from "sectarian" churches, then hardly anyone will go for this is the condition of the Christian world. But this does not mean that I have to be a sectarian, and I see no point in moving from one party to another party. I rather see a need to remain where the Lord has dropped me down (What a distinctive blessing it was to be born into the right church!) and to work and pray for the oneness of all believers, based upon catholic principles rather than upon particular opinions.

And I have no intention of that goal being misdirected by falling prey to the Sunday morning rip-off. Six times or so the New Covenant. scriptures warn us about being deceived. We do well to take heed. —*the Editor*

(This article first appeared in the October, 1975 issue of this journal. We repeat it here because of its relevance to this series.)

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ARE WE TO INTERPRET "STRICTLY" OR "LOOSELY"?

In a year or so, on May 14, 1987, we as a nation will have cause to celebrate a bicentennial of significance. Two centuries ago 55 delegates from the original 13 states assembled in Independence Hall, Philadelphia to create the Constitution of the United States. It was an assembly of intellectual and political giants, led by George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, George Mason, and youthful Alexander Hamilton. And the most astute of them all, Thomas Jefferson and John Jay were not present, being away on foreign assignments. In those days we had brains to spare!

Historians now recognize that it was unheard of in human history for a small, struggling nation of but four million people to have such an abundance of brainpower. The delegates at the Constitutional Convention were not only experienced in the ordeal of giving birth to a new nation, their own United States, which had begun on July 4, 1776 with the Declaration of Independence, but they were well read in the history of nations, in the rise and fall of empires, and they understood the struggle for freedom as reflected in

such documents as the Magna Charta. Rejecting the doctrine of government by "the divine right of kings," which had ravished Europe from which they came, they drew upon ancient wisdom by insisting that the power to rule is derived from the people themselves.

The first line of the Constitution reveals the elegance of their thinking: "We the People of the United States in order to form a more perfect union …" They may have been the most august assembly of statesmen in human history, but they saw themselves as acting for *the people.*

The document that they finally created after much debate and compromise (19 of the 55 delegates would not and never did sign it!) was a century later hailed by the great prime minister of England, William Gladstone, as "the most remarkable work in modern times to have been produced by the human intellect at a single stroke." Others have noted that the Constitution has survived the test of time, such as the trauma of the Civil War and of Watergate, only because it was rooted in the wisdom of the past. But Thomas Jefferson saw more than this, for he adjudged the delegates as inspired of God and the document they created an instrument of heaven. To say the least, what happened in Philadelphia in 1787 was unique in the history of nations. Never before had men sat down and by the stroke of a pen created a new nation with its "Supreme Law" put down in precise words at one time. Always before it was an evolutionary process over a long period of time.

At one point in the Convention when things appeared bogged down, Benjamin Franklin moved that henceforth all sessions be opened with prayer, noting that if a sparrow could not fall to earth without the knowledge of God that a new nation is not likely to rise without his blessings. The motion was lost, not because the delegates did not believe in prayer, but because they did not have the money to hire a chaplain! Since twelve of the delegates had been schoolteachers they must have believed in prayer!

If they had strong political instincts, they also had an uncanny insight into human nature. Every measure was weighed with the conviction that man cannot be trusted with power. Even with George Washington presiding, and it was assumed that he would be the nation's first President, they decreed that a sitting President could not even appoint a federal judge without the approval of Congress. Yes, they gave the President veto power (so as to limit the power of Congress!), but Congress could with enough votes override the veto. When James Madison, "the father of the Constitution," was so persistently adamant on the limitation of power, one delegate bellowed at him, "Mr. Madison, you act as if you don't trust anybody besides us." The dignified Virginian replied, "Sir, you have misunderstood me. I don't trust even us!"

They rejected anything that smacked of pomp, ceremony, and raw power. They even discussed how the President was to be addressed. While some thought the dignity of the office called for “Your Highness” or even “Your Majesty,” the majority concluded that he should be no more than “Mr. President.” Washington had refused to wear a crown and be king during the Revolutionary War, and he was not to be a King while President. When the first Supreme Court sat the judges wore gowns of black and scarlet, but at Jefferson’s insistence they did not wear wigs like their British counterparts. One rule guided our Founding Fathers, *As a nation founded under God, America was different.* Even Alexander Hamilton, who could argue persuasively that a monarchy is the best form of government, conceded that America, being different, should be a republic and not have a king.

After four months of hard work the delegates could present to the people their new government with its Constitution—“A republic if you can keep it,” Franklin would say. That evening, Sept. 17, 1787, after a majority signed the document they dined together at a nearby inn. What an occasion that must have been, a repast among statesmen who had just given birth to the greatest nation in human history! But as they bid each other adieu they realized that their work was not complete, for they had to go back home and persuade their states to accept their handiwork, for nine of the thirteen states had to ratify the Constitution before it became the supreme law of the land. It was at last ratified only when some states were assured that the power of the federal government could not usurp individual rights, which called for the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution, the first of which ruled that Congress could make no law respecting an establishment of religion.

That the Constitution has been amended only sixteen times in the 200 years that followed says something for the vision of its creators, especially since our nation has gone through such dramatic change.

Since no law is either self-enforcing or self-interpreting, the authors of the Constitution gave the President the power to enforce the law and the Supreme Court the power to determine its meaning. If a law or practice is “unconstitutional” it must be adjudged so by the Supreme Court. While we are sometimes made uncomfortable by the dictum “the Constitution says what the Supreme Court says it says,” there is much truth to it. Yet we know that the Supreme Court has sometimes been wrong, such as in the Dred Scott case in 1857 when it ruled that a Negro slave was not a citizen and had no right to sue. Many believe it was also wrong in a more recent ruling that legalized abortion.

The problem of interpreting the Constitution is similar to the problem of interpreting the Bible, especially since the Bible is often viewed as a kind of constitution. Thomas Campbell, one of the founders of our own religious heritage, was strong on seeing the New Testament as the constitution of the Church of Christ. While this is a questionable hermeneutics (Is our New Testament really like a constitution with its precise sections and articles?), there are some interesting parallels.

The New Testament, for instance, must also be enforced (or put into practice) in order to be effective, and certain popes and councils through the centuries have presumed to enforce it. Even the Puritans in colonial America fined and imprisoned people for "profaning the Sabbath." But those of us who believe in *free* religion believe that the laws of God can only be self-imposed.

The Scriptures must also be interpreted. We can always say that the Bible means what it says, but it often has to be determined what it really does say. So the Bible, too, has to have a "Supreme Court" to determine what it is made to mean. Again, popes and councils (and some preachers!) are often willing to serve as the final arbiter as to the meaning of Scripture. Again, those of us who believe in free religion insist that each person is his own final court of appeal as to what the Bible means to him. While I may draw upon many resources in determining what the Bible means by what it says, the final judgment is made in my own conscience.

The first constitutional crisis was not long in coming. President Washington's secretary of the treasury, Alexander Hamilton, wanted Congress to establish a national bank, which it did, but only after much controversy. Jefferson himself asked, "Where does the Constitution authorize Congress to establish a bank?," which is similar to questions asked about the Bible when something new is proposed. When the bill reached Washington's desk for his signature he did not know how to treat it, for the "strict" interpreters were telling him it was not authorized by the Constitution, while the "loose" constructionists argued from the principle of "implied power." The President at last agreed with his treasury secretary and signed it into law.

This illustration should help us to see that the interpretation of an authoritative document, whether the Constitution or the Bible, is no simple matter. Good and intelligent men differ, as in the case of Washington and Jefferson. It was really a matter of the silence of the Constitution, with one statesman interpreting silence as permission, while the other saw silence as prohibitive.

So it is in interpreting the Bible. When some of our churches supposed they needed instrumental music and the missionary society, there were those that asked for their authority in the Scriptures. Some saw silence as permission, others as prohibition.

Who is right, the "loose" constructionists or the "strict" constructionists?

We should be able to resolve one misconception. Just as Jefferson could not charge Washington with not believing in the authority of the Constitution because he favored a national bank when the Constitution did not specifically authorize one, neither can we charge one who uses instrumental music with not believing in the authority of the New Testament because the New Testament does not specifically authorize it.

If we learn nothing more, it is that good, intelligent, sincere people differ in their application of an authoritative document in areas where that document is either silent or ambiguous. It helps for us to recognize this and resolve to be agreeable when we differ. It is also important to recognize that men seldom differ, if ever, when the source of authority is clear and precise in its statements. For instance, our statesmen have never disagreed as to whether the Constitution makes the President the commander-in-chief of the armed forces or whether each state is allowed two senators in the upper house of Congress.

So it is with the Bible. People seldom if ever differ over what the Bible actually says, clearly and distinctly. Do people differ as to whether Moses led Israel out of Egypt or whether John the Baptist baptized Jesus. We always agree on the *facts* of Scripture, though we may differ over what those facts mean or how they are to be applied.

We have our answer as to whether we are to be "loose" or "strict" interpreters of things authoritative. We are to be both, depending on circumstances. When President Truman fired General MacArthur it caused a furor, but no one questioned the President's *right,* as commander-in-chief, to do what he did. Here we have "strict" interpretation. The controversy was over whether the President *should* have done what he had the authority to do. In this area we must allow for differences of opinion.

When it comes to what is sinful, we are to be "strict" interpreters when it comes to pride, selfishness, envy, strife, murder, blasphemy, jealousy, and all other things that the Bible clearly names as sinful. But how about drinking alcoholic beverages, attending dances, or betting on a horse race? Here we can hang "loose," however convinced we may be of the sinfulness of such things, and allow for differences. The same has to be true with

all things in which the Bible is not specific, whether societies, Sunday Schools, literature, instrumental music. Here we should adopt a "loose" construction of Scripture and recognize that these are areas in which good people disagree.

To put it another way, let us be strict with what the Bible actually says, but loose on what we think it means by what it says. Drunkenness? Strict! Social drinking? Loose!, though one should be strict with himself in relation to his own conscience, which is his Supreme Court.

This is the only way to unity. We can unite upon the "strict" areas, such as the lordship of Christ. We can accept each other even when we differ in "loose" areas. Where the Bible is unquestionably clear, unity; where it is silent or ambiguous, liberty of opinion. And always love. —*the Editor*

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THE WEED THAT GROWS AT OUR HOUSE

Just outside the sliding glass door of my study stands a noble little weed, no more than three inches high. But it has perfect symmetry with its main stem flanked by four lesser ones. It has a deep green hue and while it is petite it appears to be more rugged than dainty. In fact there is a defiance about it. That is why it caught my attention. I called Ouida to show her the unusual sight, and she told me she had already noticed it and was intending to show it to me. We have a way of pulling up the weeds on our premises, but not this one. It would seem irreverent.

This little weed is special in that it grows all alone on our expansive wrap-around driveway leading to the carport in the back. There is a hairline crack in the concrete and this little fellow wormed his way from the confining recesses below to the open spaces above, from darkness to light, from bondage to freedom. I see it now, fluttering with the morning breeze, all alone on a sea of dull concrete, telling me something of what life is all about. Not only do I admire its tenacity but I marvel at what nature does. If there is such power and wisdom in the tiny seed of a weed as to make its way through several inches of concrete to light and life in spite of immense difficulty, what are we to say of the glory and grandeur of the larger universe?

It must have been some such scene as this that led Alexander Solzhenitsyn to come up with a very impressive illustration of man's struggle to be free. If the entire world, seas and all, was covered with concrete, he observed, cracks would eventually form in the concrete here and there, and grass would grow in the cracks. That is freedom. That powerful illustration speaks to me now as I study the little weed that grows in my concrete driveway. It is as if I can see in the gallant weed one of the prisoners of Solzhenitsyn's gulag that refused to be dehumanized despite iron bars and concrete walls. It is one of the great moments in world literature when the Russian novelist told how it was while he was confined in a Soviet prison that he really became a free man.

But Solzhenitsyn's illustration, like my little weed, does something more. It points to the encouraging truth that man is born to be free and that it is not his nature to be confined, whether by ignorance, prejudice, or sectism.

Nothing seems more out of character than for man to enslave another man, whatever be the nature of the slavery. Students of the American Civil War sometimes come up with an unexpected conclusion: *those who owned slaves were often more enslaved than the people they owned.* It was something like having hold of a tiger's tail. We can remember Socrates' dictum that it is better to be wronged than to wrong.

The systems we build have a tendency to strip man of his freedom and consequently of his dignity, whether they be political, economic, or religious. I admire the old Texan who could say, in spite of his long years as a party loyalist, "I am an American first, then a Democrat." We all know too many instances of where party was put before principle. The basic political issue in our world today is an individual's freedom or bondage. Marxism is a system that places the state over the individual, and ignores human rights for the sake of the state, which is always totalitarian in nature regardless of the nation.

But the most devastating slavery of all is our own self-imposed decrees. I just now read of two women who took Communion together and prayed together in the same church for many years, and yet because of an old grudge they would not even speak to each other. There is the secretary that a minister friend told me about who was overjoyed by the raise she received, only to be crestfallen when she learned that another secretary in her department received a larger one. Some of us are devastated by the slightest criticism while others of us are fearful of trying anything new or taking any kind of chance lest we fail. Others of us are tied to the fires of the past, nurturing their ashes rather than preserving their flame.

We are often our own worst enemy, as if we locked ourselves into prisons of our own making and threw the key away. This is especially evident in the area of personal habits. The person who can't turn off his TV and do things that will give his spare time more balance is in prison and doesn't know it, as is the one who, knowing what smoking is likely to do to his body, goes right on smoking, admitting that he is both hooked and licked by the lowly cigarette. While the Scriptures assure us that no one can actually tame the tongue, we can all exercise more control, surely Spirit-control, than we do. I have a kind of envy for the person who can speak several languages, but especially when he can be silent in all of them. We must learn to be silent rather than to criticize, as well as to be silent in the face of criticism.

While the church should be a citadel of freedom, particularly *individual* freedom in Christ, it is often not the case. While Christ called us to be free (Gal. 5:1), we are reluctant to do those things that keep us liberated from "a yoke of bondage." These include a willingness to entertain new ideas and new ways of doing things, reading more widely outside our own circle, reaching out to a broader fellowship of the Spirit, and allowing (even encouraging) others to be different from ourselves. That is the idea of patience, as in 2 Cor. 6:6, which means to bear with a person in his right to be wrong as he searches for truth.

History is the story of man's struggle to be free, which may simply mean his fierce effort to be his true self, what he is deep inside as one created in the image of God. As I watch my little weed standing defiantly and alone amidst bare concrete that may be what I see. It is doing what it is supposed to do in spite of all the hazards, and isn't that what life is all about? As I watch my weed I think of the story told by Harry Emerson Fosdick of a wayward young man who finally found his way in an unusual experience. He was watching through a microscope these tiny animals that are born, breed, and die in a matter of minutes. He was impressed that while they have but moments to live, they still do their thing by breeding and perpetuating their specie. It caused him to think and finally to reshuffle his priorities. An amoeba or something less than that changed his life because he saw the hand of God at work. And so he looked at his own life and had a rendevous with freedom.

My little weed is so stubbornly and defiantly free that even if I should pluck it, it would likely appear again in a few days. But I will let it live and grow at my side as a reminder of what God does with such things as weeds and lilies of the field. And if with weeds and lilies, why not with us? The big difference is that we are free, not through the involuntary forces of nature but by our own choice. We have to receive the gift as

proffered by our Creator. It is like Nietzsche the philosopher put it in his *Either Or* philosophy. There is no middle ground and even if we refuse to choose we nonetheless choose. It is either freedom or bondage. —*the Editor.*

> The spirit and soul of all reformation is free discussion. Every reformation in society has been the offspring of free investigation. But to invite all men to reason and decide for themselves on all matters is always a dangerous experiment. - *Alexander Campbell*

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THE MYTH OF THE AUTHORITY OF SILENCE

W. Carl Ketcherside

Have you ever really thought what a gruesome image we project to the rest of the religious world? What a reflection of strife, division and the party spirit they must see when they gaze at us. The only thing that operates in our favor is not our adherence to the word of God but their own fragmentation. It is hard to point the finger of scorn at someone with a crooked leg when neither of your own is track straight. It is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. But the thing that makes us look bad is that we began as a movement to unite the Christians in all of the sects, and we have ended up with more sects than anyone else on the current world scene.

What is our problem? It is evident that some of the principles upon which we operate are termite-ridden and worm-eaten. So long as we keep trumpeting them we will proliferate our parties. We may pick up a few dissatisfied strays who will pay lip service to what we advocate, but thinking people will pass us by like a freight train does a tramp. And I am bold enough to say that one of our weaknesses is the perpetuation of the myth of *the authority of silence.*

We claim authority from two sources. One is what God said. The other is from what He did not say. I buy the first. I stake my hope of eternal life upon it. But the second is by nature divisive. It undoes the first. We can unite every belief in the apostolic testimony upon the first. But having united them we will scatter them into fragments upon the basis

of the second. We must either divest ourselves of this idea or throw in the towel and cease declaiming that we are working to unite all believers. Actually we are working to divide them. Let me tell you why I affirm this.

1. *The theory is based on a false assumption*. Those who hold it operate on the conjecture that God laid down a meticulous pattern for the believers in the first century. The word "meticulous" is from the Latin word for fear. There is inspired within everyone an unhealthful fear of deviating in the minutest respect. This provides some grotesque examples of attempts to reproduce the original in a time and culture foreign to the one in which the Christian faith came. For years, the Quakers used "thee" and "thou" as a form of address. The Old-Order Amish and others wear "plain clothes" which means coats without lapels. They scoff at wearing ties as they would any other work of the flesh. Their women wear a prayer veil which appears as a doily on top of the head.

For years our brethren railed against "bobbed hair," a subject no longer discussed from our pulpits. It has now been relegated to certain of the Pentecostal sects, whose women make up in elaborate and bouffant coiffures for their inability to trim their locks. The early church did not have radios, so for years we warned against them. The Bible says nothing about the television sets so we went through a period of lashing out at "piping an open sewer into your living room." One segment of the restoration movement drew a line of fellowship against owning an RCA or Magnavox, and gave new converts thirty days to get rid of the instrument of Satan in the living room.

An editor of the *Firm Foundation* has had much to say about what he calls "pattern theology," although I have observed that he, like the rest of us, is generally able to make either the pattern or the theology flexible enough to provide what he wants. That is why he is called "a liberal" by little minds who could not define the word if they were to be shot at sunrise. The pattern is not what the pattern provides or prohibits. It is simply that the pattern itself is a creation of latter-day saints. My only pattern is Jesus. He is also my *theos logos*, my theology. Jesus died to establish a relationship with God, and not to hand down another Law.

The fact is that since God did not provide every little detail to be ritually kept by all people in all places at all times, the silence of God has no authority involved in it. Actually it is dictated by western culture. We are always getting our culture and God's will confused. If we ever get them sorted out into their proper barrels we will be a lot happier. What we do with the pieces left over will present some problem. The easiest way to dispose of them will be to do what Paul did with his past life, toss them in the garbage can.

2. *The "law of silence" is not a law at all*. Like so many of our other "laws" it is not found in a statement in the holy scriptures. It is derived from textual juggling. Certain passages are lifted from both the Old and New covenant scriptures and are brewed together to make the heady tea which becomes our unwritten creed. The one who selects them knows what he wants to prove before he chooses his "proof." By manipulating them skillfully he can make them prove what he wants to prove. But is that what God wants proven? If not, how can one derive his conclusion from the text? Is this not a form of wresting the scripture? Is it fair with the Book to treat it in such fashion. Alexander Campbell had a word for those who did so. He called them "textual scrap-doctors."

Take for instance the "gopher wood" argument devised primarily to prove that the use of instrumental accompaniment in conjunction with praising God is a sin. We shall ignore for the time being the validity of *any* argument taken from the old covenant scripture to prove such a proposition. The contention is that since God authorized gopher wood out of which to construct the ark, Noah had no choice. The use of any other kind of wood would have condemned him to death with the unbelieving ante-diluvians. It is implied that if Noah had used one other kind of board in the construction, the whole vessel would have been grounded, all the animals would have been trapped in it, and would have drowned in the deluge.

The general deduction is that "gopher wood" was from a particular species of tree. In my palmy days I used to identify it as cypress. But George Bush, Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Literature, at New York University, writes, "Probably trees, or rather *woods of Pitch."* He further adds, "It is doubtful whether *gopher* is the name of any particular species of tree." And again, he says "In other words, a general term for any kind of resinous wood suitable for the purpose." It may have been that, instead of having no choice, Noah had quite a choice in selection of materials. Perhaps he did not have to search around for a *gopher tree* after all. The most that can be said about the argument which has been made with such assertiveness is that it is full of doubt, and a little unworthy of one who is attempting to establish "authority." Such textual manipulation is a travesty on the judgment of one who seeks to guard his own integrity as an interpreter.

It is true to bow before the authority of God is spiritual in the highest degree. Such authority is found in what God has revealed. One can read it in what he has spoken. The church is built upon the apostles and prophets, upon what they revealed. It does not have another piling holding it up and representing what they did not say. To be in subjection to that is to be in subjection to the vacillating authority of men. That is degrading and

denigrating to the spirit. When men devise arguments based upon their theorizing, one should contest them and not consent to them. To do the latter is to surrender the freedom wherewith Christ has set us free. Every hierarchy on earth operates upon assumed authority. “But it shall not be so among you, for all of you are brethren.”

The Jews were preoccupied with what God had not said. They engaged in long and pointless discussion over what God must have meant in areas where he had not spoken. The result is that they made void the law of God by their traditions. We also have our traditions. No people who have survived more than two generations are without them. We will be fortunate indeed if we do not frustrate the will of God, which is the unity of all who trust in Him through faith in Jesus, by those traditions which we hear proclaimed more frequently than we do the blessed gospel.

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

A “Wanted: Minister” ad in *The Australian Christian* caught my eye because of some of its details. “He should be a committed Christian with Elders qualifications,” the ad reads, which ought to say it all, though we in America hardly ever put it that way. More qualifications: a good preacher, able to relate to elderly and young alike, innovator, good home and hospital visitor, not liberal in theology, not charismatic, Bible study leader, responsible to Eldership, and “sound in Churches of Christ N.T. Teaching.” And they don’t bother with the small c “Church of Christ”! Just thought you’d be interested in how your Australian brethren do it.

Our dear friends, David and Ann Reagan, celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary last summer while in Jerusalem leading a tour. We congratulate them. In the same letter Dave tells of lecturing in Lexington at the University of Kentucky campus on cultism. He was attacked as “intolerant redneck fundamentalists” by a Unitarian minister who admitted he did not even believe in God. The head of IBM, Lexington’s largest employer, who is a Mormon, did not appreciate Dave’s workshop on Mormonism. The ACLU also got involved by going to court and trying to get the seminar kicked off campus. The judge, apparently influenced by the Constitution (which is not always the case even in court these days!), threw them out of court. Have you noticed that everybody has a right to speak on campus —Communists, secularists, atheists, socialists, even occultists —except Christians, particularly those that have something to say? You can believe that Dave’s

meetings enjoyed overflowing attendance from the students, especially when efforts were made to run him off. College kids do not buy such tactics. We must speak out and lay claim to our freedoms. That is what America is all about.

Do you realize that a majority of the Christians in the world is in what missiologists now call the Two-Thirds World, mainly Africa, Asia, and Latin Amcrica?

And that by 2000 A.D. Africa will be the most Christian (in terms of numbers) continent on earth? But this same Two-Thirds World is also the most deprived among the nations of the world in terms of poverty and oppression. These facts have sharpened the church's awareness of social responsibility. Even leading evangelicals are saying that they no longer believe that the church's mission is only to save souls. International conferences have been held at Wheaton College on evangelism and social responsibility, and it is evident that even conservative churches have a growing awareness of "the holistic approach to missions." As *The Wheaton Declaration*, growing out of these conferences, put it. "We have failed to apply Scriptural principles to such problems as racism, war, population explosion, poverty, disintegration, social revolution, and communism." Do you think Churches of Christ/Christian Churches share in this growing awareness. Such vigorous responses to starvation in Ethiopia and the earthquake in Mexico City would indicate that there is a growing concern, along with numerous other "social" concerns.

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BOOK NOTES

The Doe of the Dawn, the bound volume of this journal for 1983-84 has been mailed to those who ordered it. It is a beautifully crafted volume and a bargain at $10.50 which is barely more than the annual subscription, and we pay the postage if you send a check with your order. With this library copy on hand you can give away your loose copies. This bound volume has its own preface, a table of contents, and colorful dust jacket. It is buckram green with gold lettering, the work of a real craftsman. We are pleased to offer it to the public at such a low price for a 400-page volume.

The other bound volumes makeup a matching set. They are: *Principles of Unity and Fellowship* (1977) and *The Ancient Order* (1978), single year volumes, $5.50 each. Other double volumes are: *Blessed Are the Peacemakers* and *With All the Mind* (1979-80) and *Jesus Today* (1981-82) at $9.50 each. This means we now have five volumes of this journal from 1977 to 1984. If you order all five volumes there is a special price of $35.00, postpaid if you pay in advance.

Robert Schuller's *Tough Times Never Last, But Tough People Do!* is chock-full of goodies on how to live in this world. He tells you how to be tough in facing your problems. $6.50 postpaid. A similar kind of book on self-improvement is *Do Yourself A Favor: Love Your Wife.* It starts with the husband's question, "Honey, is anything wrong?," and it doesn't turn you loose. $3.50 postpaid.

If you are interested in learning of other religions —Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Secularism —read *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* by Stephen Neill. $7.95 postpaid.

From our own heritage there is worthwhile reading: *The Fool of God* by Louis Cochran is a historical novel on the life of Alexander Campbell. $11.95 postpaid. *The Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* by Robert Richardson is happily still in print at $21.95 postpaid. Still selling big is *The Stone-Campbell Movement* by Leroy Garrett at $21.95 postpaid. You can get it free by sending us a club of 8 subs at $3.00 each ($24.00), but you must request the book.

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READERS' EXCHANGE

I am enclosing a list of subs to *Restoration Review,* which I have done every year for 25 years. I continually appreciate your work and oppose evil division and maintain the unity of the spirit. —*Frank Poynor, Portales, NM.*

(This is something most all of our readers can do, share this journal with others. We keep our club rate low for this reason. In clubs of four or more it is only $3.00 per name. Send the names to us; we do the mailing. —*Ed.*)

I worry about *Restoration Review* during the next decade and beyond. In my reading I came across the idea that a journal should die with its editor. What do you think? The journal has been a source of enlightenment and balance for me throughout the years and I would hate to see it altered significantly from this course. —*Michael Wison, West Memphis, AR*

(As to whether a journal should die with its editor would depend on what kind of journal it is. If it is a house job or a party medium it might well be carried on by others. If it is the extension of one person, it might well die with its editor since it would not likely survive anyway. It is very easy for journals to die these days even when their editors do

not. As for us, we take the months one by one, with no plans for folding our tent. The Lord will lead. —*Ed.*)

Ironically both *Restoration Review* and *The Spiritual Sword*, which started when I was "converted" from "conservative" Christian Church to set me straight by "sound doctrine," come to me. I'm careful not to create an earthquake by putting them together. — *California*.

(That this brother refers to his conversion from Christian Church to Church of Christ with quotation marks, indicating that it was not really a conversion, is revealing. When some Churches of Christ sponsored a mission to convert "denominational preachers," which was directed largely to Christian Churches, this brother being one of the "converts," this journal opposed it as disgustingly sectarian, and I personally appeared before said organization at one of its annual meetings and urged that it close shop. I wrote the elders who sponsored it, urging them to do something constructive. That the mission has closed down and its promoters are now sponsoring unity summits with the Christian Church are signs that better days are here. As for *Spiritual Sword* and *Restoration Review* coming in the same mail, the reader will notice that the former refers to my views almost as much as the latter, especially the current issue. But I am better represented in the latter! —*Ed.*)

I admire you for trying to work for change from within the Church of Christ. I couldn't do that. I had to leave. Not only for myself but because I could not put my children through what I had been through in the Church of Christ. I am still very angry with the Church of Christ and see it as the single most destructive influence in my life and in the life of my family of origin. At the same time it has given me something to push against, and in that sense it has been the source of growth. —*Name/address withheld (now a Presbyterian)*

(What an indictment! Alas for the price we pay for our legalism! Oppression instead of blessings! The only good news here is that things are improving, so much that many (a majority?) in Churches of Christ would readily concede that if one is a Christian in the Church of Christ she does not cease being one if she goes to the Presbyterians. And when for that reason perhaps a better Christian. —*Ed.*)

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